

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**STATEMENT OF  
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CHAIRMAN**

**before the  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC AND THE  
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT**

**From L'Aquila to Copenhagen: Climate Change and Vulnerable Societies**

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Climate change presents an enormous threat to every country and every region of the world. Rising temperatures and sea levels, decreasing supplies of fresh water and increasing frequency and severity of hurricanes and other weather events have already had a significant negative impact on the physical and biological environment as well as on human health. In addition, climate change is a "threat accelerant," which may turn existing local and regional instabilities into open conflicts.

The most serious impacts are coming—and sooner than even the most pessimistic predictions made only a few years ago by the world's best scientists. According to an important report commissioned jointly by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and CARE International, "Climate change is happening with greater speed and intensity than initially predicted. Safe levels of atmospheric greenhouse gases may be far lower than previously thought, and we may be closer to an irreversible tipping point than had been anticipated. Meanwhile, global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are rising at steeper and steeper rates. Emissions reductions efforts have been too little, too late."

Alarmingly, the report notes that climate change will likely have a drastic effect on human migration and displacement: "Current and projected estimates vary widely, with figures ranging from 25 to 50 million by the year 2010 to almost 700 million by 2050." Even the mid-range of these estimates would create the largest, fastest and most destabilizing migration of people in the history of the world.

There is no group of people for which climate change poses more threats than the most vulnerable. Indeed, ironically, the poorest countries will disproportionately suffer the consequences of climate change despite the fact that the sum total of their greenhouse gas emissions is insignificant compared to that from the wealthy industrialized countries. Those living on low-lying coral atolls and in coastal areas, and those who depend on

subsistence farming, face a looming existential threat. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, for example, the countries of Africa will see crop yields decline by a staggering 50% within 11 years.

Thus, while limiting the impacts of climate change will require a drastic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions over the long-term, perhaps the more acute need is assisting those who face hardship even under optimistic reduction scenarios. Rising sea levels, increased ocean acidification, greater coastal erosion, lower crop yields and fisheries productivity, greater numbers of extreme weather events, lessened access to fresh water, and spikes in health problems resulting from climate-sensitive diseases are inevitable to some degree. Adaptation to climate change can ameliorate some of these effects, but adaptation comes at a cost, one which the poorest countries often are not in a position to afford.

The disparity between those most responsible for climate change and those most burdened by its effects make adaptation assistance for vulnerable societies a moral obligation. As the State Department's Special Envoy for Climate Change, Todd Stern, said in May, "One of the greatest challenges in climate change is that the developing countries, indeed the poorest of developing countries are suffering serious impacts. They have done the least to contribute to the problem, and they are set up to be the most badly affected by it."

According to Yvo de Boer, head of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the world needs to invest \$50-70 billion immediately to help poor countries adapt to climate change, with much more needed later. Yet, on a bilateral basis, less than one billion dollars has been spent by wealthy nations in helping the most vulnerable adapt, according to an analysis by the Overseas Development Institute. And most of that spending has consisted of reallocations of existing aid budgets rather than new money, leaving less funding for critical health, education and other developmental needs.

On a multilateral basis, rich countries have pledged an additional \$6 billion to two climate investment funds administered by the World Bank. But none of those pledges have been fulfilled. And even if they are, funds will only be available to recipients in the form of loans rather than grants. The UN Global Environment Facility, meanwhile, which distributes about \$250 million annually for climate change projects, has provided only \$100 million to the world's 49 poorest countries, with the rest going to more economically-advanced nations.

In the United States, the Obama Administration has been hard at work trying to address the challenge of climate change in the aftermath of the Bush Administration's inaction. The House just passed critical legislation, the Waxman Markey bill, which would cut greenhouse gas emissions 17 percent by 2020 from 2005 levels, with a mid-century reduction target of 83%. To achieve the decrease, Waxman-Markey would employ a cap and trade mechanism. That mechanism would allocate a small amount of the revenues generated—initially one percent, gradually increasing to four percent by 2027—for adaptation and clean energy for developing countries. Estimates of what those

percentages will mean in actual dollars vary considerably, but according to Oxfam America, they would produce \$750 million on an annual basis initially.

The recent L'Aquila meetings of the G-8 Summit and Major Economies Forum also made some progress in addressing climate change as agreement was reached on a long-term goal of reducing global emissions by 50% by 2050 from 1990 levels, with developed countries making 80% cuts by the middle of the century. In terms of adaptation, the MEF declared that "financial resources for mitigation and adaptation will need to be scaled up urgently and substantially and should involve mobilizing resources to support developing countries." Unfortunately, neither the MEF nor the G-8 made hard financial commitments to assist developing nations.

Thus, while the United States and other industrialized countries recognize the importance of assisting the most vulnerable, the sums actually appropriated have fallen woefully short of the need. The wealthiest countries neglect represents not only a moral failure, but a strategic one as well since poorer nations have come to view the UN climate negotiations with skepticism. And absent their support, the December 2009 Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen may collapse, with negative consequences for every country in the world, rich and poor alike.

Given the grave impacts of unchecked climate change, failure in Copenhagen is not an option. With political will, the challenges of climate change can be addressed and adaption can succeed. As the authors of the "Humanitarian Implications of Climate Change" report noted, "the scope and scale of challenges we face may be unprecedented; but we meet them already having many of the resources—including knowledge, skills and relationships—needed to protect the dignity and basic rights of persons threatened by displacement from environmental change."

Mustering the political will to fund adaption for the most vulnerable requires sustained attention. Unfortunately, that sort of focus has been absent thus far from the international stage. This hearing, which follows a similar one the Subcommittee held last year, is meant to help fill that gap.